

# ‘AKIAPŌLĀ‘AU

(*Hemignathus munroi*)

The woodpecker-like hammering of this bright yellow honeycreeper is a distinctive sound in the koa-‘ōhi‘a forests and dry māmane-naio woodlands it inhabits on the island of Hawai‘i.

**DISTRIBUTION:** Endemic to the Big Island, the range of ‘Akiapōlā‘au is fragmented into four separate areas: from roughly 3,300 to 7,000 feet in Ka‘u, Hamakua, and Kona and from 6,000 to 8,700 feet on Mauna Kea.

**DESCRIPTION:** The unusual bill of the ‘Akiapōlā‘au is its most remarkable feature. The slender, decurved upper mandible is twice as long as the stout, woodpecker-like lower bill. Males often have a yellow head and are olive-green above and bright yellow below. Lores are black. Females are smaller and paler than males. Length is 5.5 inches.



Specialized beak of the ‘Akiapōlā‘au -Photo by Jack Jeffrey

**VOICE:** Males have two primary songs: one is a loud short “pit-er-ieu;” the other is a longer, more warbling song with a rising clear whistle at the end. A more elaborate whisper song is also given. Call note is similar to that of the ‘Amakihi, but stronger and more melodious.

**NESTING:** Two nests of the ‘Akiapōlā‘au have been found, one in October and one in February. Both nests were abandoned while under construction. Throughout the year, males have been observed singing, and social groups of a male, female, and one juvenile have been sighted. Both observations indicate that ‘Akiapōlā‘au may have a prolonged breeding period.

**DIET:** ‘Akiapōlā‘au are sturdily built for the demanding task of hammering on large branches of koa and māmane trees to obtain their insect diet. They are partial to beetle larvae which they glean by using their sickle-like upper bill to probe and their stout lower bill to excavate.

**CONSERVATION NOTE:** As with other endangered forest birds on Hawai‘i, the ‘Akiapōlā‘au once had a much wider and continuous distribution. In the 1890s they were fairly abundant and widespread. The sandalwood harvest and the grazing of goats, cattle, and sheep all contributed to the loss of extensive areas of dry forest. The present fragmented range of the ‘Akiapōlā‘au is interrupted by these deforested lands. It is not known if the birds travel over these deforested areas or if the populations remain isolated.

The prospects for long-term survival of the ‘Akiapōlā‘au would be greatly improved if pastureland separating their populations is reforested. Protection and management of their existing habitat is also crucial to their survival. The establishment of the Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge will help to ensure that some of the essential habitat of the ‘Akiapōlā‘au and other endangered species is preserved.